



A journal for restless minds

TEMPORAL DYNAMICS

Enjoying the ride

TO LOVE THE TRUTH

Better to look good than to be good

I SEND YOU OUT

On a mission of love

DEACON'S DINER

Food for a restless mind

Colloquī is a Deacon's Corner weekly journal. Its mission and purpose: to encourage serious discussion, to promote reasoned debate, and to provide serious content for those who hope to find their own pathway to God.

Each week Colloquī will contain articles on theology, philosophy, faith, religion, Catholicism, and much more.

Be forewarned! Articles may and often will contain fuel for controversy, but always with the express intent to seek the Truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help us God.

Temporal Dynamics

Enjoying the ride

Time. There are those who claim with certain confidence that time is a steady beat, each tick the same as every tock; no difference between the first, the last, the next, or any other. How then to explain the acceleration, the contradiction, and the relativity?

The hands of time move a turtle's pace when watched by youthful eyes toward their release, while older eyes but blink in wonder at its accelerating meter. And thus we ponder the imponderable contradiction: the variant pace of invariant time. And then the puzzlement which does most befuddle: where sense of time diverges in the minds of fellow travelers, yet never differs in the slightest when they meet at journey's end.

It amazes how, sans winged feet, time so soon takes flight with impatient

speed toward tomorrow. Yesterday then arrived, but ancient history; now left behind what was and what could have been.

How swift the weeks have hastened hence when I first took to pen to birth this journal for restless minds. With this issue of Colloquī, fifty-two issues published over the past fifty-two weeks have been laid to rest; I can only hope a few

have found some small merit in what has been put to page. No one is perfect, we are, in all respects, sinners; broken in some fashion, shape or manner, beholden to our loving God, to whom we pray for mercy and forgiveness. I must confess to a mis-

step or two or three or ... well, let us simply say more than a few and leave it there.

Needless to say, I know this next year will come to a close ever faster than the last. Rest assured, I will endeavor to do my utmost to find the words to help light your own pathway, outside of time, unto our God.



To Love The Truth

Better to look good than to be good

For as long as I can remember—a span of some sixty-five years or more—books have been constant companions. What thoughts reside beneath the cover, what truths revealed, what tales be told, a book is a record grooved to last far longer than the heart, the soul, the mind of the one who penned the words now writ upon its pages.

To be sure, there are books which matter little, their content of no consequence or substance, poorly written, without attention to the truth. These are *“but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more ... a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”*¹

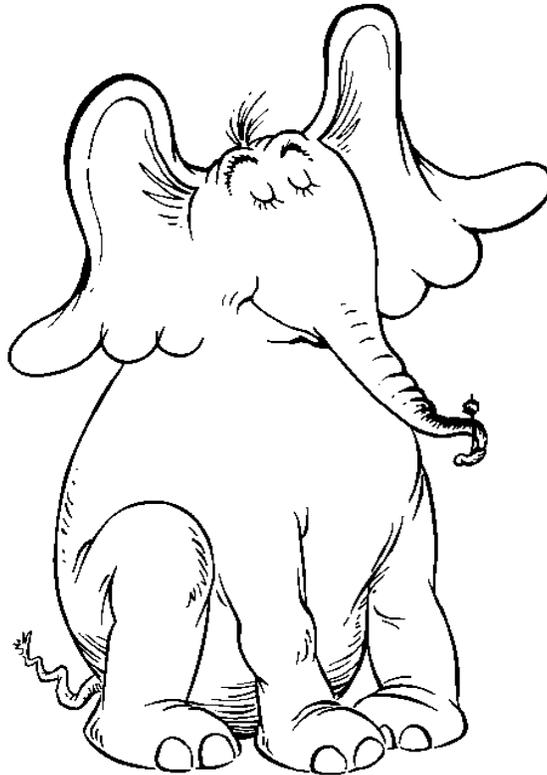
There are books which of necessity and currency are destined to live but the briefest moment. Of timed importance, a passing fancy or obsolescence, like Nehru jackets or buggy whips.

But then, there are books, magnificent, wondrous works which speak of timeless beauty and objective truth, of courage, goodness, and moral rectitude; of determination in the face of struggle, of strength and endurance in spite of pain, of triumph over evil, and of perseverance which overcomes doubt, weakness and tragic loss.

Rare are the books that so profoundly touch the soul, that would free the mind from the bonds of self-

circumscribed predilections. As rare as those you would call true and lasting friends.

Recently, I came upon a book which quite happily I now call a friend. Its title holds much in common to an old friend from long ago—like Jon and John—but no more alike than fact to fiction.



The old friend, born from the mind of Robert Heinlein, I knew as *“Stranger in a Strange Land”*, a strange and controversial piece of science fiction from thirty years ago. My new friend, differs in title but by a single letter, *“Strangers in a Strange Land”* yet holds no other kinship to its elder.

Written by Charles J. Chaput, the Archbishop of Philadelphia, *“Strangers in a Strange Land: Living the Catholic Faith in a Post-Christian World”* is described as *“a fresh, urgent, and ultimate-*

ly hopeful treatise on the state of Catholicism and Christianity in the United States. America today is different in kind, not just in degree, from the past. And this new reality is unlikely to be reversed. The reasons include, but aren't limited to, economic changes that widen the gulf between rich and poor; problems in the content and execution of the education system; the decline of traditional religious belief among young people; the shift from organized religion among adults to unbelief or individualized spiritualities; changes in legal theory and erosion in respect for civil and natural law; significant demographic shifts; profound new patterns in sexual behavior and identity; the growth of federal power and its disregard for religious rights; the growing isolation and elitism of the leadership classes; and the decline of a sustaining sense of family and community.”

Catholic World Report, in its review wrote: *“Strangers in a Strange Land* is a thought-provoking depiction of a complex contemporary scene. As he fills in his canvas, the author cites a wide variety of sources: magisterial documents and Church Fathers (especially Augustine), historical figures, contemporary ethicists and social scientists, and even poets. Yet throughout the book Chaput is much more than a cultural commentator; he is a pastor instructing souls. Although his message is challenging, the tone is always civil, conversational rather than controversial, and never preachy. In a non-academic way, with remarkable clarity and gentle wit, the author offers remedial lessons in Catholic morality and social doctrine for generations.”

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As for myself, every page—every page—was a jewel, a different facet, a fascinating and illuminating excursion through the cultural and societal landscapes of our country. Here I met a friend, willing to challenge, daring to state the truth, enjoying conversation not confrontation, offering facts not opinion, making suggestions not demands.

It will, no matter which arc of the pendulum you prefer, illuminate and educate. It is not so erudite as to be incomprehensible nor is it a dry, barren wasteland filled with sand and little else. There is truly “*meat on them bones,*” more than enough to chew on for a very long time. I know I will be enjoying leftovers for a long, long time.

There is a directness and a clarity to what Archbishop writes. In speaking of objective reality and truth he says:

“We live in a culture eager to make truth a boutique experience as malleable as our personal tastes require. As the moral philosopher Harry Frankfurt writes, a vast and congenial river of baloney, humbug, and mumbo-jumbo flows through American culture that has its source in ‘various forms of skepticism which deny that we can have any reliable access to an objective reality, and which therefore reject the possibility of knowing how things truly are.’ But we need to remember what—or rather who—comprises the culture. Things we can’t control do often impact our personal decisions. But the fact remains that ‘the culture’ is little more than the sum of the choices, habits, and dispositions of the people who live in a particular place at a par-

ticular time. We can’t simply blame ‘the culture.’ We are the culture. Failing to cultivate a taste for truth, then, is an abdication of our duties not just to God, but also to one another. By contributing to a culture that seeks to invent its own truth, we make it harder for others to find the real thing. The results are deeply damaging. Subcultures of deceit emerge in places within our society where honesty is most important.”²

A culture of deception and dishonesty has infiltrated even the most trusted institutions, including the Church. One report, which focused on the military, illustrates the way a culture of deception metastasizes from individual compromises with the truth to infect an entire institution—any institution, even one explicitly built on honor. As Archbishop Chaput writes:

“A similar issue occurs in education, where a parade of cheating and grade-boosting scandals in recent years has shown that, for many students and even their teachers, the truth is important only if it serves the goal of advancement. Students have cheated for millennia. There’s nothing new about it. But these days in America, 75 percent of high school students admit to cheating on their academic work. And the problem goes well beyond high school.

The curious thing about today’s academic cheating is the shift from cheating out of desperation to cheating to stay on top. The archetypical school-age cheater is thought to be a struggling student who peeks at the smart kid’s test answers. But with the proliferation of the cheating and the rising stakes of academic performance, the new “typical” cheater is a successful student anxious to remain at

the head of the class for college or professional placement.

A California high school student captures not just the cheating mentality, but a core fact of current American life: “There’s so much pressure to get a good job, and to get a good job you have to get into a good school, and to get into a good school you have to get good grades, and to get good grades you have to cheat.” Note the words “have to.” The student ignores her own agency and blames a culture that requires her to cheat. It’s a plausible kind of lie, pitched both to the interviewer and to herself. But it’s still a lie. The culture of deception is, in part, the free choice of students who **decided** to cheat.

It would be foolish, though, to blame academic cheating mainly on young people. Fierce academic competition—or at least the competition to get into the “right” schools—places huge pressure on persons just emerging from childhood. The combination of high stakes and the implicit message that honesty can be set aside for a while to serve a sufficiently vital goal like long-term financial success almost guarantees a culture of lying.

The pressure often starts within the family. Evidence suggests that a great deal of cheating is done to please parents. In many U.S. households the family culture—not the big, bad, soulless society “out there,” but the values passed down from parents to their children—places achievement above honesty. And when parents are, for example, ‘diagnosis shopping to get a doctor to say [their children] have [attention deficit disorder] so they can have extra time to complete their SAT test, it’s not hard to see how that message is

I Send You Out

On a mission of love

For we the living this universe, this world, this place we call home is our inheritance. As long as we may live we are thus in the world and it is up to us to deal with it as it is now, to leave it a better place for those who are yet to come.

There is a proverb which speaks of the timelessness of truth. *"Time is the unfolding of truth that already is."* Truth, any and all truth, must by its nature always and everywhere be true; truth can never bear false witness, truth can never lie.

Here, in this place and at this moment, recognizing what has come before and acknowledging all who have preceded us, this is where we encounter God, the source and being of all truth. In Jesus—the transcendent God who became man—we encounter *"the way, the truth, and the life"* and are sent into the world to bring the *"Good News"* to all nations and to all peoples.

We are surrounded by mystery. Life itself is a mystery for which we will never fully understand. The Ascension is a mystery beyond simple human understanding and yet we are wont to try.

Classic images depict Jesus rising and floating above his disciples, ascending toward the heavens. Mark wrote, *"So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of*

*God."*¹ Luke wrote that *"While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven."*² John's Gospel makes no mention of the Ascension although John wrote in Acts that *"when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight."*³ In Matthew alone there is no mention of the Ascension. This is significant both in its absence and implication.



The Ascension should not be thought of as necessarily a distinct historical event. Early Easter narratives tend to depict the appearances of Jesus as manifestations of the already risen and ascended Christ, such as Paul's Damascus experience in 1 Corinthians 15. Later appearance narratives, including those found in Luke and the Acts of the Apostles tend to separate the Resurrection and the Ascension, not as two distinct and successive events, but rather in order to reflect upon the meaning of two aspects of a single, indivisible event. For several centuries the church did not, either in its writings or in the liturgy, treat the Ascension as a unique event that actually *"occurred"* on the fortieth day after the Resurrection.

Today, the church calendar continues the tradition of observing the Ascension on the fortieth day as a matter

of convenience, although many places transfer the observance to the following Sunday. This is in keeping with the thought of providing the opportunity to contemplate and reflect upon this singular aspect of the Easter event.

Matthew closes his Gospel not with the Ascension of the Lord but with the Commissioning of the Disciples. This, at first blush, may feel incomplete, as if the writer was interrupted and left it without a proper ending, without a *"goodbye."* And yet, there is perhaps another way of looking at Matthew's closing, one that helps us to see the commissioning as the final act in the Easter narrative rather than an unfinished and dissatisfying

ending.

If we are to consider the Resurrection and Ascension as two aspects of a single event and all subsequent appearances of Jesus to be manifestations of the already risen and ascended Lord, then we can begin to see things in a new light. Christ's Resurrection and Ascension no longer signify an ending but a new beginning. His Resurrection and Ascension no longer appear to be a departure but a new coming of his Spirit, the Holy Spirit. And thus we may better understand what he is telling us when he says, *"behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age."*

God came to us through Christ; God gave Himself to us in Christ; God is with us by the Holy Spirit. Through Him, with Him, in Him we share in his

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ascended humanity and in his eternal divinity. Clearly, this is a mystery beyond our comprehension or understanding. It is a mystery so profound, a reality far beyond our poor ability to depict or put into words.

We live in a time of severe crisis. Suffering, persecution, torture, pain, sorrow, hatred, terror, anger, fear; these are real and tragically ever-present in our lives. The pages of our magazines and newspapers and the shrill voices shrieking over the radio and television give awareness of the evils that surround and threaten to overwhelm us.

Christianity is on the defensive. We are in the midst of a religious crisis, fueled by the coverage of that selfsame media which not only refuses to admit to the truth of the crucifixion, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, but at its core resists and denies the very existence of the transcendent God whom Jesus revealed to the world; the world in which we now live.

Contemporary accounts of Jesus, as commonly taught at such academic shrines as Texas, Harvard, and Emory Universities seek to “set Jesus free” from scripture and creed. Which leaves us to ask, “then what is Jesus without scripture or creed?” To which we are assured he is like a “Jewish Socrates or Lenny Bruce. Jesus was perhaps the first stand-up comic—not political, not programmatic, offering no program for the world. It turns out that the most reliable description of Jesus is that he is ‘an ironic secular sage.’”

How strange? To think, for over two millennia the world thought Jesus was God, and now, thanks to contemporary academic studies, authored by esteemed and learned speculative theoreticians, we are now to believe that Jesus was just like all those professors, an “*ironic secular sage*.” Although one can only wonder how Jesus could be considered a contemporary of such august minds given he held no academic credentials, lacked tenure and never had so much as a single word published in a peer-reviewed journal.

“The contemporary ‘secular sage’ insists that it is all so ordinary, this faith, this story, this gospel, this Jesus. Yet it is precisely the extraordinary, the supernatural, that makes him what he is—not only his moral teachings (which some great sage might dream up), but also his resurrected body (which no other religion has come up with), and the seeming disgrace of his cross.”

It is not new, this struggle of faith in Jesus Christ. Since the beginning it was known that if we banish Christ’s divinity, he and all of us are utterly alone. He was just another heap of chemicals who died. It is humanity alone on that cross. And it is a stranded humanity that is left with post-Resurrection delusions.”⁴

Despite the crises we now face, it is into this world that God sent his only Son, not to condemn but to redeem and save us, to save us all. In all the appearances of the risen and ascended Christ, his message was always, “Do not be afraid for I am with you always, until the end of the age.” It is the ascended Christ who says, “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”

The final appearance of Jesus takes place on a mountain. Mountains were often the location of very significant events between God and his creation and thus has great theological significance. Biblical scholars locate the Garden of Eden on a mountain. Abraham took his only son Isaac to a mountain to be sacrificed. Moses received the Ten Commandments and spoke with God on the mountain at Sinai. Jesus gave us the Beatitudes, the great sermon on a mountain. The transfiguration took place on a mountain.

So it is fitting and proper that his final appearance should be on a mountain. His disciples would be attuned to the significance of the place but doubtful of his final message to “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” After all, they were doing all that they could to stay out of sight for fear of the Jews.

But after Pentecost, after receiving his spirit, they no longer doubted, they no longer were afraid, they did as Jesus asked when he said: “I send you out on a mission of love. Go and spread the Good News.” His mission still exists today. He is still sending us out. So, go and spread the Good News. Amen.

Homily for the
The Ascension of the Lord (A)
Acts 1:1-11
Ephesians 1:17-23
Matthew 28:16-20

1. Mark 16:19.

2. Luke 24:51.

3. Acts 1:9.

4. John Kavanaugh, SJ, *The Beyond*, The Sunday Website of St. Louis University.

being sent.

The banking industry, corporate life, the mass media, religious ministries, athletics, law schools: Each has its scandals. In nearly every case the pattern is similar: Truth is adjusted or 'interpreted,' ignored or justified away, to get seemingly urgent results. And deceit then spreads and takes root like a weed."³

As a logophile, that is, a lover of words, I believe as Marilyn Chandler McEntyre, that caring for language is a moral issue. *"Caring for one another is not entirely separable from caring for words. Words are entrusted to us as equipment for our life together, to help us survive, guide and nourish one another."*⁴ For her—and I share her sentiments—, language is a life-sustaining resource which like any resource, *"can be depleted, polluted, contaminated, eroded and filled with artificial stimulants. Like any other resource, it needs the protection of those who recognize its value and commit themselves to good stewardship."*

The word *truth* (*veritas* in Latin) comes from the Old English *triewth* or *treowth*, meaning faithfulness, constancy, trustworthiness. The notion that *truth* means *"consistent with fact"* goes back a very long way. Over many centuries it has taken on addition meanings of real, genuine, accurate, and correct. Of course, for Christians, truth is not just a word but a person, Jesus Christ, who said, *"I am the way, and the truth and the life"* (Jn 14:6), the incarnate Word of God. And God, who is the creator of all that is real and true, cannot lie, for he is the source of all truth; he is truth.

*"But in an everyday sense, 'truth' means the conformity of what we say and hear with things that are real—"real" being more than just material, measurable data but never excluding them. When we tell the truth, we're faithful to the facts as we know them, whether we like them or not. We can never escape our point of view, but we're truthful when we make an honest effort to present the facts fairly and accurately, respecting the rights of the people who will hear them—whether we like them or not. That's telling the truth. Therefore words are precious because they can serve or subvert this important task."*⁵

Language has been abused and misused over the past century, so much so that it has become nearly incomprehensible. Laundered words and empty slogans, as George Orwell suggested, are the political obscenities of the age. Evasion, understatement, obfuscation, and outright prevarication mislead the hearer and corrupt the speaker. Dishonest language feeds upon itself, adding fuel to the fire. It leads to more mendacious thought, more lies, and more corruption.

As Orwell famously said, *"Political speech and writing are largely the defense of the indefensible ... When there is a gap between one's real and one's declared aims, one turns to long words and exhausted idioms, like a cuttlefish squirting out ink."*

Or Catholic philosopher Josef Pieper who wrote that *"the abuse of political power is fundamentally connected with the sophistic abuse of the word." And the degradation of man by man, and the systematic physical violence against human beings, have their beginnings "when the word loses its dignity" because "through the word is accomplished what no other*

*means can accomplish, namely, communication based on reality."*⁶

Archbishop Chaput taps into this *"communication based on reality"* in observing the less than sterling record of the news industry.

"Overt lying certainly can and does happen in America's news industry. Jayson Blair at the New York Times, Stephen Glass at the New Republic, and Janet Cooke at the Washington Post are merely the most high-profile cases in recent memory—along with NBC's former news anchor Brian Williams and his factual "mistakes."

But much more common is a chronic newsroom prejudice in the shaping of certain kinds of news. Planned Parenthood is assumed good, while critics who secretly film its cynicism, profiteering, and barbarism are assumed bad, to cite only one of many examples. And the language of "abortion rights," common in most newsrooms, has the familiar Orwellian ring of avoiding an unpleasant reality (killing a child in utero) by calling it something else.

Thus does the magic of words rework the sinews of the universe.

*And as in the news media, so, too, in politics. The White House elected to power in November 2008 campaigned on compelling promises of hope, change, and bringing the nation together. The reality it delivered for eight years was rather different: a brand of leadership that was narcissistic, aggressively secular, ideologically divisive, resistant to compromise, unwilling to accept responsibility for its failures, and generous in spreading blame."*⁷

As McIntyre observes, quoting Pascal, “We ‘hate the truth, and people hide it from us; we want to be flattered, and people flatter us; we like being deceived, and we are deceived.’ The deceptions we particularly seem to want are those that comfort, insulate, legitimate and provide ready excuses for inaction.”⁸

Or as Chaput so rightly concludes, “Every deceit is a trip to unreality, and unreality can be a pleasant place to visit. But it’s a narcotic that always wears off with an ugly hangover. For an individual, a taste for it is tragic. For a people, it’s lethal.

You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free. So says the Gospel of John (8:32). There is no justice, no beauty, no goodness, without truth, because truth is the voice of God’s authentic reality. Truth is the measure of reality itself; and without it, “justice” is a human equation based on power and arbitrary will. We were meant for something higher. We were made to be the kind of creatures who share in the glory of God himself. Freedom is the self-mastery to know and to do what’s right, and thus to have the capacity to stand upright in the presence of God’s judgment and love.

And this is why the great American Catholic writer Flannery O’Connor said that the truth will not only make you free, it will also make you odd. In a world of hyperbole, duplicity, factual disfigurement, and spin, speaking plainly and living honestly in obedience to Jesus Christ is an abnormal behavior. And the cost of that discipleship (but also its rewards) can be high.”⁹

No doubt there will be those who

are offended in some way by Archbishop Chaput’s observations. No doubt, and yet, his sharp wit and intellect do him great service and this book is truly an inspiring read.

Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, OFM Cap., was named archbishop of Philadelphia in 2011 by Pope Benedict XVI. As a member of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation, he was the second Native American to be ordained a bishop in the United States and is the first Native American archbishop.

He is the author of *Living the Catholic Faith: Rediscovering the Basics* and *Render unto Caesar: Serving the Nation by Living Our Catholic Beliefs in Political Life*—as well as numerous articles and public talks..

I firmly believe this book ought to be carefully and seriously read by every Catholic. It is well-written, a compelling and thought-provoking book which everyone will and can appreciate.

1. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act V, Scene V.
2. Charles J. Chaput, Archbishop of Philadelphia, *Strangers in a Strange Land: Living the Catholic Faith in a Post-Christian World*, (Henry Holt and Co., February 21, 2017), 116-117.
3. *Strangers in a Strange Land*, 118-119.
4. Marilyn Chandler McIntyre, *Caring for Words in a Culture of Lies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 1-2.
5. *Strangers in a Strange Land*, 120.
6. Josef Pieper, *Abuse of Language, Abuse of Power* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 32-33.
7. *Strangers in a Strange Land*, 123.
8. McIntyre, *Caring for Words*, 56-57.
9. *Strangers in a Strange Land*, 123-124.

Deacon’s Diner

Food for a restless mind

For those restless minds that hunger and thirst for more. Each week this space will offer a menu of interesting and provocative titles, written by Catholic authors, in addition to those referenced in the articles, for you to feed your restless mind.

BOOKS

On Conscience
Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger
Ignatius Press
2007, 82 pages.

Called To Communion
Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger
Ignatius Press
1996, 165 pages.

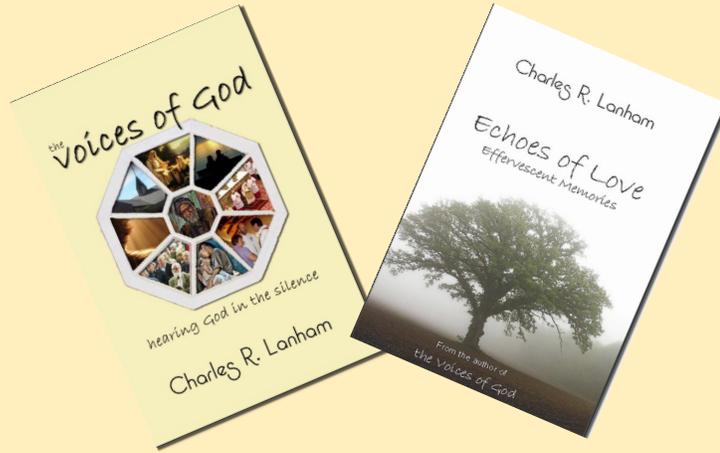
Strangers in a Strange Land
Charles J. Chaput
Henry Holt and Co.
February 21, 2017, 288 pages.

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Deacon Chuck Lanham is an author, columnist, speaker, and a servant of God.

He is the author of **The Voices of God: Hearing God in the Silence**, **Echoes of Love: Effervescent Memories** and is currently writing his third book **Without God: Finding God in a Godless World**.

He is the bulletin editor for Saint Albert the Great Catholic Church. He has written over 230 articles on religion, faith, morality, theology,

Each issue of **Colloquī** can be viewed or downloaded from

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